

Athens' defeat in 404 B.C. ended its political and economic supremacy. But Athens continued as the cultural center of the Mediterranean world for nearly another century.

To most, the age of Pericles expresses the democracy and culture of Athens at its peak. Pericles ruled from 461 to 429 B.C., when he fell victim to the plague that swept Athens in the early years of the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian historian Thucydides, who recorded the events of the war, included an account of a speech given by Pericles shortly before his death. Reading 7 is a modern translation of the speech. As you study it, think about the following questions:

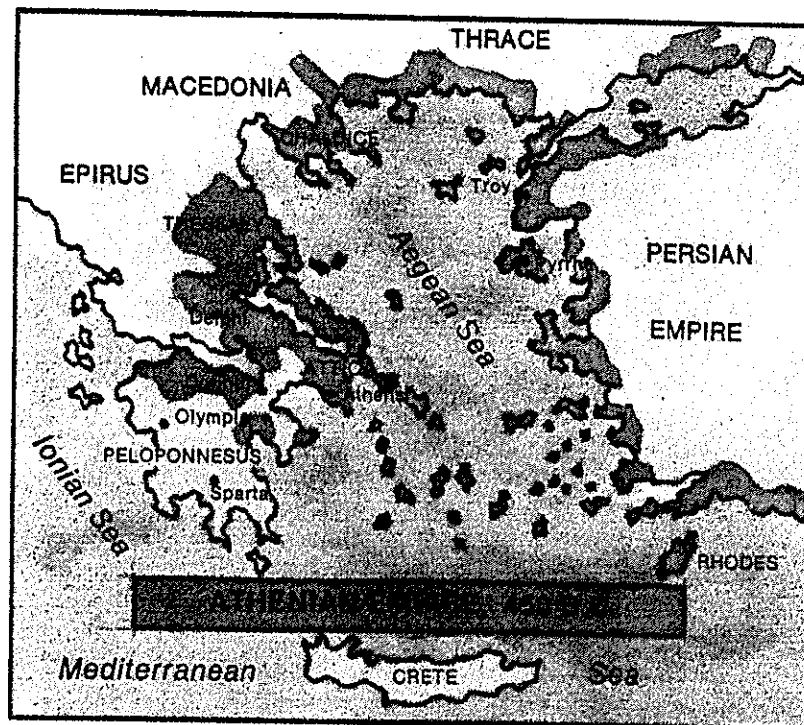
1. According to Pericles, what are the characteristics of the great city-state?
2. What advantages did Pericles think that the political and social systems of Athens had over others?
3. How do Athenian values differ from present Christian values? How are they similar?

## Pericles in Praise of Athens

*At the end of 431 B.C., after a year of the Peloponnesian War, Pericles spoke at a ceremony honoring those who had fallen in battle. Recent victories over invading Spartan armies had boosted the confidence of the Athenians, and Pericles reflected this mood. He praised the values fundamental to all Athenians and rallied the citizens to the defense of their city.*

Before I praise the dead, I should like to point out those principles which had guided our rise to power and describe the institutions and way of life which have made our empire great. For I believe such thoughts are appropriate to the occasion and the citizens and foreigners gathered here may profit from them.

No other form of government rivals our own institutions. We have not copied the governments of our neighbors, but rather, have set an example for them. We are called a democracy because the power to make laws is given to many rather than a few. But while the law gives equal justice to everyone, it does not fail to reward excellence. While every citizen has an equal opportunity to serve the public, we reward our most distinguished citizens by asking them to make our political decisions. Nor do we discriminate against the poor. A man



may serve his country no matter how low his position. We do not allow secrecy in our public affairs, and in our private relations we are not suspicious of one another. We do not become angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes. While we are tolerant of how our neighbor acts, we approach our public duties with reverence. We are prevented from doing wrong out of respect for the authorities and the laws, particularly the laws that protect those who have been injured.

Our military policy is also superior to that of our enemies. Our city is thrown open to the world. We have never expelled a foreigner nor prevented him from seeing or learning anything he could use against us as our enemy. We do not control the lives of our citizens and trick our neighboring cities to assure victory. Instead, we depend on the patriotism of our hearts and the skills of our hands. And in the matter of education, while the Spartans force their youth into lives of hardship and labor to make them brave, we live an easy life. Yet, we are equally ready to face the perils of battle. And here is the proof: The Spartans come to Athens not by themselves, but with all their allies. At the same time we seldom have difficulty defeating them in their own territory, where they are fighting for their homes. Our enemies have never faced our entire military force. We have had to divide our men

among our navy and several armies. But when our enemies defeat a part of our force, they are as proud as if they had defeated us all, and when they are defeated, they pretend that our entire force defeated them.

If we prefer to prepare for danger with a light heart rather than with laborious training, and if we gain our courage by force of habit rather than by force of law, do we not gain much? We do not devote our entire attention to getting ready for war, but when the hour comes we are as brave as those who never stop preparing for battle.

Our city is an excellent place to live. We are lovers of the beautiful, yet we have simple tastes. We cultivate the mind without losing our manliness. We use our wealth for our needs, not for show. To be poor is no disgrace; the true disgrace is in doing nothing to avoid poverty.

An Athenian citizen does not put his private affairs before affairs of the state; even our merchants and businessmen know something about politics. We alone believe that a man who takes no interest in public affairs is more than harmless—he is useless. And if few of us have the imagination to develop new policies, we all are sound judges of the policies proposed by others. Our enemies believe that discussing a policy prevents action, but we believe that the greatest barrier to wise action is not understanding an issue. Athenians have that particular ability to think before they act, but we do not allow thinking to interfere with acting. Other men either act without thinking or hesitate to act if they think.

We are also unlike other cities when it comes to doing good. We make our friends by doing favors, not by receiving them. He who does a favor is the better friend. We do good to our neighbors not because we want them to repay us in our own time of need but because we are men of good will.

In short, I say that Athens is the school for all Greece. The individual Athenian is able to adapt to all types of conditions and to undertake any project with grace. Our city shall always be remembered. Mighty monuments of our power are the wonders of our own age and will be the wonders of ages to come. We shall not need any poet to praise us, for we have compelled every land and every sea to yield to our valor. Everywhere we have left memorials of friendship and our hostility. Such is the city for whose sake these men nobly fought and died. Everyone of us who survives should, like them, gladly suffer for Athens.

The sacrifice which they made has been repaid to each of them, for each has received our praise, and each has been given the noblest of sepulchers [tombs]. I do not speak of those sepulchers in which their bones are laid, but of those in which their glory survives and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion in word and deed. For the whole earth is the sepulcher of famous men.

> If what Pericles said was true, would you agree with him that Athens was "an excellent place to live?"

> Pericles' speech could be classified as propaganda. He praises the political, military, and cultural life of the Athenians to arouse their patriotism. What place, if any, does propaganda have in politics today? Should it have any place?

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